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The Relapse and an End of the Restoration Comedy

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John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse; or Virtue in Danger* was first performed at the Drury Lane Theater on 21 November 1696. The source of this play is, pointing out the obvious, Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* premiered in January 1696. *The Relapse* inherited several main characters from *Love's Last Shift*, and was designed to be the second part, or an antithesis, of it. In Cibber's play, Loveless, who left his wife Amanda and his home in search of debauchery, returns and finds his Amanda still virtuous and waiting for his homecoming in spite of the eight years absence of her husband. At the final scene, he sheds tears of regret and forswears his libertine way of life, and then decides to live in his country with his wife. As a reply to the sentimental mien of Cibber's drama, *The Relapse* turns the hero Loveless once again into a rake who betrays his loving Amanda and sleeps with her cousin Berinthia.

This clear contrast has been the key to reading *Love's Last Shift* and *The Relapse* as a set of comedies that demonstrate the two main tendencies in the English comedy of the last decade of the seventeenth century. Concerning these two plays, Robert D. Hume writes a bit mockingly: 'The strange popular reputation of these two plays suggests that they epitomize a clash—the first great 'sentimental' comedy debunked by one of the last true 'Restoration' comedies' (*Development* 412). The reason why Hume slightly ridicules the typical opinion is that both plays are the mixture of humane and bawdy elements.¹ It is true that, as is often pointed out, in *Love's Last Shift* Loveless is 'Lewd above four Acts' (Epilogue 16),² and the rake Worthy in *The Relapse* renounces his rakish temptation to Amanda saying that 'the vile, the gross desires of flesh and blood, is in a moment turned to adoration'

(5.5.160-62).³ However, it is also true that audiences of *Love's Last Shift* shed 'floods of tears' (Hume, *Development* 412) over Loveless and Amanda and then it became the big attraction of the play, and that Worthy's conversion in *The Relapse* is at best temporary as he admits '[h]ow long this influence may last, heaven knows' (5.5.163-64). What we need to grasp is the point each play featured most to attract an audience. The rake hero's tears of regret was the biggest appeal in one, and the once again converted Loveless's love affair with Berinthia, in addition to Worthy's temptation of virtuous Amanda, rang the bell in the other—except for the famous fop played by Colley Cibber, Sir Novelty Fashion in *Love's Last Shift*, who was going to be created as Baron, Lord Foppington in *The Relapse*.

Though Cibber's successful histrionics must be one of the reasons that Vanbrugh decided to write the sequel, this paper focuses on the other and the biggest feature of *The Relapse*: the way of representing the erotic. While we can refer to several articles that analyze *The Relapse*, little of them offer the importance of eros in the text. Helga Drougge's paper, an analysis of *The Relapse* from a feminist standpoint, points out that 'the erotic attention span of the Restoration macho is so short' (519-20), with which I agree, but since Vanbrugh obviously uses 'the Restoration macho' as a theatrical attraction, we need to contemplate why it is used and what it signifies. Drougge's conclusion that *The Relapse* contains 'a threat to masculinity by pointing to the element of quick collapse in Restoration macho sexuality' (520) is not persuasive enough partly because it doesn't mention Coupler's homoerotic desire at all. Other critics so far have been inclined to focus on the language of *The Relapse*. Alan Roper, explicating Vanbrugh's 'witty inversion of a traditional language and morality which are principally those of homiletic literature' (59-60), argues that '*The Relapse* is undoubtedly a moral play...because, without recommending vice, it shows the ubiquitousness of vice' (61). James E. Gill refutes Roper's argument by suggesting that the meaning conveyed by the language of *The Relapse* is not so clear-cut. Gill aims to show 'a way of deconstructing Vanbrugh's deconstruction of the language of his play' (111), reading through the dualism—double entendre of words like 'heaven', 'bliss', and 'death'—on which Vanbrugh's text is based.⁴ Both Roper and Gill do not pay enough attention to the theatrical aspect, especially on how to represent the erotic, which I would argue is at the heart of *The Relapse*. Eros represented in the play is quite significant in both terms of the thematic and theatrical aspects. Carnal

desires depicted in several ways in *The Relapse* not only crystallize the play's strategy for attracting the audience but also delineate an end of the Restoration comedy. One sort of comedy—one centering on sex both in theme and performance—which flourished during a short period of the Restoration comes to an end at some point in the history, and we can see this by reading *The Relapse* and its production history. Though sometimes the play is compared with its former part, *Love's Last Shift*, and is said to be the landmark of the last Restoration comedy, these plays are in several respects the two sides of the same coin. We can therefore witness an end of the Restoration comedy in a production of 1777, when *A Trip to Scarborough*, the adaptation of *The Relapse* by R. B. Sheridan was staged.

I

Since *The Relapse* was planed as a second part of Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*, it can be safely said that Vanbrugh had a certain plan in remaking it. The chief feature of *Love's Last Shift* was Amanda's rewarded virtue which brought tears to the audience. On the other hand, *The Relapse* highlighted Loveless's going back to libertinism as the title visibly shows. Though it is impossible to reconstruct correctly the author's intention by reading through the text, this clear contrast at least allows us to presume that Vanbrugh or the theater company must have had some strategy in adapting Cibber's well-accepted drama—and the text provides us some evidence of it. We can suppose that Vanbrugh, in producing a contrasting sequel, tried to set a common ground on which the audience would enjoy the play. In other words, the author tried to manipulate the audience's response, especially in the scenes in which erotic representations were involved.⁵

Looking into the prologues and epilogues of both plays, we can find a clear contrast that Vanbrugh tried to create.⁶ One of the selling points of *Love's Last Shift* is, as Cibber states in epilogue, that '[t] here's not a cuckold made' (Epilogue 4) in the play. What Cibber relied on was 'the ladies' taste' (Epilogue 20), which, Cibber expected, would regard the rakish manner as 'out of fashion' (Epilogue 15).⁷ The theater company's strategy for producing *Love's Last Shift* was to encourage the female audiences to have compassion for Amanda: 'Pray, let this figure [Amanda] once your pity move' (Epilogue 22). Vanbrugh is also aware of the influential people in the audience, the

'Ladies' (Prologue 1), as he directly appeals to them with the very first word of the prologue. However, Vanbrugh's attitude toward the female audiences was quite contrary to Cibber's. Vanbrugh, with some affected humility, states that his wit is 'as slow in growth as grace' (Prologue 2), therefore 'it can ne're be ripened to your [the ladies'] taste' (Prologue 3). Here we can see his clear opposition, or challenge, against the 'ladies' in the theater who were expected to favor morals rather than wit. In the epilogue, Vanbrugh let Lord Foppington share disgust toward the author with the female audience. 'Ladies, Gad's curse!' (Epilogue 32), Foppington cries with his affected French accent, 'This author is a dag, and 'tis not fit / You should allow him ev'n one grain of wit' (Epilogue 33-34). Because wit includes the manner of seduction, not only in this play but also in many other comedies in the Restoration, it is natural that the 'Ladies' disliked it if they preferred a moderate sentiment. Vanbrugh shows his blatantly defiant attitude toward the 'Ladies' by associating Foppington with them: it is Vanbrugh himself, neither the 'Ladies' nor Foppington, who has real wit and estimates the value of it.

In the preface to the published edition in 1697, Vanbrugh also assumes a challenging attitude to those who might disagree with the play. His targets are not only the ladies but the 'well-bred persons' (Preface 25-26) who, supposed to be clerics, claimed there were 'two shining graces...blasphemy and bawdy' (Preface 10-12). His style, calling 'blasphemy and bawdy' as 'shining graces', is the same as his inverted use of Christian morals in the text as we will see later. To this accusation he answers as follows:

For my part, I cannot find 'em out. If there were any obscene expressions upon the stage, here they are in print.... I believe with a steady faith, there is not one woman of a real reputation in town, but when she has read it impartially over in her closet, will find it so innocent, she'll think it no affront to her prayer book to lay it upon the same shelf. (Preface 13-20)

We should not take his claim literally. Vanbrugh here is not defending his play by saying that there is not any bawdy scene in it. Rather, he plays the devil's advocate, as it were. His statement in this preface is at most a desperate defense by tricky wit, or it is not a defense at all. Vanbrugh continues: 'I expect to have these well-bred persons always my enemies, since I'm sure I shall never write anything lewd enough to make 'em my friends' (Preface 25-27). His sarcastic rhetoric is only

for distinguishing us from them. Those who do not accept theatrical lewdness as a part of entertainment are uninvited guests for Vanbrugh. He manipulates the readers', or the potential theater-goers', reaction to this play so that they should share the common ground of 'blasphemy and bawdy' in order to enjoy the witty content of it.

Vanbrugh's use of a hackneyed image of Cupid typically shows his approach. He does not employ a unique conceit nor surprising metaphor but uses traditional figures of speech in an inverted way:

LOVELESS. When 'twas my chance to see you at the play,
 A random glance you threw at first alarmed me,
 I could not turn my eyes from whence the danger came.
 I gazed upon you till you shot again,
 And then my fears came on me.
 My heart began to pant, my limbs to tremble,

 But found at last your arrows flew so thick,
 They could not fail to pierce me; so left the field,
 And fled for shelter to Amanda's arms.
 What think you of these symptoms, pray?
 BERINTHIA. Feverish every one of 'em.
 But what relief, pray, did your wife afford you?
 LOVELESS. Why, instantly, she let me blood;
 Which for the present much assuaged my flame.
 But when I saw you, out it burst again,
 And raged with greater fury than before.
 Nay, since you now appear, 'tis so increased,
 That in a moment, if you do not help me,
 I shall, whilst you look on, consume to ashes. (*Taking hold
 of her hand*)
 BERINTHIA. (*breaking from him.*)
 O Lard, let me go! 'Tis the plague, and we shall all be
 infected.
 LOVELESS. (*catching her in his arms, and kissing her*)
 Then we'll dye together, my charming angel! (3.2.85-112)

The imagery of Cupid's arrow lapping over Berinthia's glance, the metaphor of love as wounds from arrows, which turns into love as disease and contagion, and the pun on death—these are all ordinary figures of speech in love poetry. What is important in his employment

of the image of Cupid is that it is associated with a religious figure, the angel. Loveless here woos his wife's cousin, which is obviously against Christian morality. Loveless, turning again to his previous libertine way of life, reveals his morally improper sexuality by using explicitly Christian diction. In addition, Berinthia well understands Loveless's double entendre, and plays her role as a doctor who conducts a diagnosis on his 'Feverish' self—she knows Loveless's fever means his desire for having affair with her. This kind of sarcasm is the basis of Vanbrugh's wit.

Combining love intrigues with religious imagery makes a foundation for Vanbrugh's way of representing the erotic. As many critics, among them Pieter Jan van Niel and Michael Cordner, have pointed out, the religious imagery in *The Relapse* is calculated so well as to create a graceful but blasphemous atmosphere. One of the most explicit examples is as follows:

BERINTHIA. Now, friend, this I fancy may help you to a critical minute. For home she must go again to dress. You (with your good breeding) come to wait upon us to the ball, find her all alone, her spirit inflamed against her husband for his treason, and her flesh in a heat from some contemplations upon the treachery, her blood on a fire, her conscience in ice; a lover to draw, and the devil to drive. —Ah poor Amanda!

WORTHY. (*Kneeling*) Thou angel of light, let me fall down and adore thee!

BERINTHIA. Thou minister of darkness, get up again, for I hate to see the devil at his devotions.

WORTHY. Well, my incomparable Berinthia, how I shall requite you?

BERINTHIA. O ne'er trouble your self about that: virtue is its own reward. There's a pleasure in doing good, which sufficiently pays it self. Adieu!

WORTHY. Farewell, thou best of women! (5.2.53-69)

Here inverted are the images of light and darkness—van Niel argues that they make a pair of the central motifs of this play⁹—usually employed to support the Christian morality distinguishing good from evil. Berinthia, who manages to achieve the intrigue between Worthy and Amanda and plays the role of bawd, is admired as an 'angel of light' and 'best of women'. Both Berinthia and Worthy understand well

enough that what they are contriving is debauched, as she calls him ‘minister of darkness’. Berinthia’s ‘virtue’, which she says is rewarded in itself, is totally different from Amanda’s, or the virtue usually supported by the church.¹⁰ The outraged Jeremy Collier would criticize this kind of blasphemy a couple of years after the premiere of *The Relapse*, but a tension between the anti-theatrical reform movement and the theater business ran among them even before the Collier controversy.¹¹ Vanbrugh clearly stood on the side of the advocate of theatrical blasphemy, and even advanced it by representing sensual acts with Christian terminology.

Not only providing the ‘blasphemy and bawdy’, Vanbrugh also invites us to agree to it as a part of theatrical entertainment. He tries to set a common ground on which those who attended to the performance can accept the represented sensuality:

BERINTHIA. Nay, never pull, for I will not go.

LOVELESS. Then you must be carried. (*Carrying her*)

BERINTHIA. (*Very softly*) Help! help! I’m ravished! ruined! undone! O Lord, I shall never be able to bear it. [*Exit Loveless carrying Berinthia*] (4.3.76-79)

At the last moment of Loveless’s seduction of Berinthia, she only makes believe she wants to reject him. She has contrived to have an affair with Loveless and here her wish is fulfilled—and vice versa. She does not mean to exclude Loveless at all, and the audience is asked to be complicit with them. Berinthia’s calling for help in a whispering voice is Vanbrugh’s calculated joke, by which he tries to manipulate the audience to have a laugh of acceptance. Vanbrugh’s strategy for producing *The Relapse* is to convince the audience that theatrical eroticism is, if presented in a well-mannered way, indispensable for a comedy and that the audience should know it.

On the other hand, *The Relapse* presents an example of a ‘bad-mannered’ erotic affair through Lord Foppington. What he does is not so widely different from the business of the rake heroes of the Restoration comedies, but how to do it and its outcome is fatally different. Foppington, whose life is ‘a perpetual stream of pleasure, that glides through such a variety of entertainments’ (2.1.212-3), misunderstands that Amanda loves him because she asks about his ‘amours’ (2.1.244). He smiles to himself, saying in an aside that ‘Tis a vast pleasure to receive encouragement from a woman before her

husband's face' (2.1.295-6), and then starts to woo Amanda in front of his company. This motif reminds us of the notorious 'china scene' of *The Country Wife*—Horner takes away Lady Fidget from the company of her husband Sir Jasper to the next room, in order not to show her a piece of china but to have sex with her. Flirting with a wife in the presence of her husband is itself a comic pattern of cuckolding plots, but Foppington's way of achieving it—'speak the thing plainly to her at once' (2.1.297-8)—without any strategy is far from Horner's smart intrigue. As a result, he gets smashed by Amanda and stabbed by Loveless, which Worthy calls a correction: 'I am glad you [Loveless] have corrected him [Foppington] without farther mischief' (2.1.405). Distinguishing a fop such as Foppington from a gallant like Loveless is one of the recurring questions presented through the Restoration comedies, partly because both well-mannered and bad-mannered sexual affairs are based on the same epicurean drive to follow 'a perpetual stream of pleasure'. In *The Relapse*, Foppington's manner of pursuing his desire is labeled as 'bad', while it requires the audience to accept the 'well-mannered' Loveless's affair with Berinthia.

We can find Vanbrugh's other manipulative approach working in the plot of Worthy and Amanda. In *Love's Last Shift*, Amanda's invincible virtue led Loveless to reform his libertine way of life, but in *The Relapse* her virtue seems to wobble when she witnesses her husband's rendezvous with masked Berinthia:

AMANDA. But let him know,
 My quiver's not entirely emptied yet,
 I still have darts, and I can shoot 'em too;
 They're not so blunt, but they can enter still:
 The want's not in my power, but in my will. (5.4.34-38)

Amanda, getting angry with Loveless, even implies she could have affair with someone else if she would want it. Soon after this speech, Worthy comes on stage as he planned and the audience expects even Amanda might have an affair with him. Vanbrugh raises the audience's sensual expectation level through the proceeding of this plot, but suddenly stops it at one point:

WORTHY. What is it will convince you of my love?
 AMANDA. I shall believe you love me as you ought, if, from
 this moment you forbear to ask whatever is unfit for me to

grant. —You pause upon it, sir. —I doubt, on such hard terms, a woman's heart is scarcely worth the having.

WORTHY. A heart like yours, on any terms is worth it; 'twas not on that I paused. But I was thinking (*Drawing nearer to her*) whether some things there may not be, which women cannot grant without a blush, and yet which men may take without offence. (*Taking her hand*) Your hand, I fancy, may be of the number. Oh, pardon me, if I commit a rape upon't (*Kissing it eagerly*); and thus devour it with my kisses. (5.4.104-17)

Amanda clearly rejects Worthy by saying that she cannot give him what is unfit to grant. Amanda's address to Worthy—'You pause upon it, sir'—can be read a stage direction for the actor playing Worthy who has been wooing her. Here he stops for a moment to think about what to do next, and desperately starts violating her body. Worthy lost the game when Amanda ordered him not to ask 'whatever is unfit' for her, and the audience's expectation also ended in disappointment. It can be said that those who 'pause upon it' were not only Worthy. Amanda addresses the men anxious to see her defeat—by her words, 'You pause upon it, sir', male spectators were made to realize what they had wanted to see was aborted. This is also a part of Vanbrugh's dexterous manipulations because what we are to witness is stated in advance in the subtitle of this play: not virtue defiled, but virtue in danger.

As for the sexual representations in R. B. Sheridan's *A Trip to Scarborough*, we can find that Sheridan decided not to inherit Vanbrugh's way of manipulating the audience to accept the theatrical eroticism. In particular, extramarital relations are not divided into two, acceptable and unacceptable, as depicted in *The Relapse*, but are represented as vice to be shunned. It is true that in *A Trip to Scarborough* Loveless still pursues Berinthia and Townly (a new character who replaces Worthy) seduces Amanda. However, as the change of name from Worthy to Townly implies, such an extramarital relationship is represented as one which does not have any positive value. One of the explicit moments when Vanbrugh's manipulative approach can be seen is Act 4 Scene 3 as we have seen above, which is rewritten as follows:

LOVELESS. Nay, then, let me conduct you, my angel.

BERINTHIA. Hold, hold! You are mistaken in your angel, I assure you.

LOVELESS. I hope not, for by this hand I swear—

BERINTHIA. Come, come, let go my hand, or I shall hate you.

I'll cry out, as I live.

LOVELESS. Impossible! You cannot be so cruel.

BERINTHIA. Ha! Here's someone coming. Be gone instantly.

LOVELESS. Will you promise to return if I remain here?

BERINTHIA. Never trust myself in a room with you again while I live. (4.3. 48-56)¹²

In *The Relapse*, Berinthia only pretends to reject Loveless and asks for help in whispering voice. Berinthia in *A Trip to Scarborough* does not have a serious desire for having an affair with Loveless, nor plays a role of bawd for Townly who pursues Amanda. Unlike Berinthia in *The Relapse*, her deeds do not betray her words. We can see the difference between these two plays when Loveless seduces Berinthia by calling her 'my angel'. It is not used in the same way in *The Relapse* in which an inverted meaning was conveyed through Christian terms. In *A Trip to Scarborough*, Berinthia rejects being called Loveless's angel, suggesting that he should take it for his wife Amanda. Even Townly realizes his sin in moral and confesses his love for Berinthia after he is rejected by Amanda: 'I was mistaken when I began to think lightly of Amanda's virtue, and may be in my censure of my Berinthia. Surely I love her still; for I feel I should be happy to find myself in the wrong' (5.2.91-94). Vanbrugh's sarcastic use of language such as an inverted use of 'light' and 'darkness' and 'angel' disappears from Sheridan's adaptation. In *The Relapse*, we can see several points in which Vanbrugh tries to manipulate the audience's reaction to the play, especially in his use of erotic images. He invites us to accept the 'blasphemy and bawdy' things as a part of theatrical entertainment. Sheridan clearly grasps Vanbrugh's manipulative approaches, and eliminates them all including heterosexual and potentially homosexual elements, as we will soon see.

II

For the purpose of this paper which discusses the significance of sexual representations in *The Relapse*, we should not miss the

other aspect of eroticism depicted in this play: homosexual desire. When discussing the homoerotic in *The Relapse*, the relationship between Coupler and Young Fashion is always focused on. Stephen Orgel pioneered this research topic arguing that Coupler is ‘the first character...who would be recognized as gay in the modern sense’ (61). By researching the stage history, David L. Orvis amplifies this point and argues that ‘*The Relapse* provided spectators with a salient model for constructing and expressing a sodomitical sense of self’ (156) in the eighteenth century. But, as Orvis points out, Coupler’s homosexual behavior must have conveyed quite different meaning before 1715 when Young Fashion was played by an actress. We need to consider two phases: before and after 12 December 1715.

According to *The London Stage*, Mrs. Kent played the role of Young Fashion at the premiere,¹³ which gave a twist in the relationship between Coupler and Young Fashion—textually homosexual but potentially heterosexual on the stage representations. As cross-dressed actresses, known as ‘breeches part’, were big attractions on the Restoration stage, especially for male audience who wanted to fulfill their visual pleasure by gazing at the actress’s legs laid bare through the breeches, Young Fashion played by Mrs. Kent was obviously a theatrical device to rouse male spectators’ heterosexual desire. Coupler’s behavior is sodomitical only when we ignore the aspect of performance:

COUPLER. ...What mischief brings you home again? Ha! you young lascivious rogue, you. Let me put my hand in your bosom, sirrah.

FASHION. Stand off, old Sodom!

COUPLER. Nay, prithee now, don’t be so coy.

FASHION. Keep your hands to yourself, you old dog you, or I’ll wring your nose off.

COUPLER. Has thou then been a year in Italy, and brought home a fool at last? (1.3.180-88)

Coupler’s reference to Italy, the stereotype of the country for homosexual men, suggests that he has an inclination toward same-sex sexuality and wants Young Fashion to be a mate. Coupler, ‘old Sodom’, gropes Fashion’s breast by way of greeting, which Fashion tries to throw off—textually it may look like homosexual flirting, but theatrically it is harassment on the body of an actress. Another

example comes after Coupler's offer to save Young Fashion from his present predicament:

FASHION. Egad, old dad, I'll put my hand in thy bosom now.

COUPLER. Ah, you young hot lusty thief, let me muzzle you!

—(*Kissing*) Sirrah, let me muzzle you.

FASHION. (*Aside*) P'sha, the old lecher! (1.3.264-7)

Fashion also shows somewhat lewd behavior in return for Coupler's favor, which is exceeded by repeated kisses from 'the old lecher'. Vanbrugh here uses the female body on stage as an attraction at least for the male spectators, as many playwrights of the previous generation did through the breeches part. These scenes are in the same category with the seduction of Amanda by Worthy, and his attempted rape on her body, in terms of the exploitation of the female body for the visual pleasure of male audience. Vanbrugh caters to the male heterosexual desire by offering an actress's harassed body under the tricky mask of the homoerotic.

However, Vanbrugh's theatrical trick using the cross-dressed actress was not a trick anymore after 1715 when a male actor started to take the role of Young Fashion. The first actor who played Fashion was Thomas Walker¹⁴, aged 17 at that time. Benjamin Johnson had been taking the role of Coupler since the premiere, and he was 47 years old when he played with Walker in 1712. Then the role was gradually taken over by 'Wilkes Jr.', William Wilkes, the nephew of Robert Wilkes. William Wilkes played the role of Fashion on 23 October 1718 for just one performance, and he took it over from Walker in 1721 when he was 25 years old (Coupler was still played by Johnson). Wilkes played Fashion until 1724 (probably until 3 July 1725), then 'Cibber Jr.', Theophilus Cibber replaced him in 1725. Cibber, aged 22, started to play the role at the Drury Lane theater with Coupler by Johnson (aged 57). Cibber-Fashion and Johnson-Coupler continued until 1734 when Richard Cross, whose birth year is not known, replaced Cibber. In sum, Young Fashion played by adolescent actors and Coupler played by Johnson, a middle-aged comedian, were on stage from 1715 to 1734. Even after 1734, *The Relapse* was constantly performed on the London stage until the 1765-66 season, which contained a 'male couple' of Fashion and Coupler.¹⁵

It is not easy to interpret this phenomenon, but it would be important to note that the homoerotic as performed through Coupler

after 1715 was constantly on the stage of the eighteenth century London theatre. David L. Orvis, using this ‘longevity of Coupler’s stage presence’ (156) as evidence, argues that ‘Vanbrugh’s affirmative portrayal of the sodomite would have supported, and might even have encouraged and validated, the formation of sodomitical identity’ (156). This view can be supported by Randolph Trumbach’s argument that in the early eighteenth century the gay culture in the modern sense started to form.¹⁶ But what is important is, above all, the fact that the ‘old Sodom’ Coupler was constantly performed on the eighteenth century stage as a part of theatrical entertainment—which is different from Vanbrugh’s strategy in the premiere, though. Same-sex sexuality was a significant part of the culture of court libertines but not usually represented on stage while the ‘merry gang’ of the Earl of Rochester, Charles Sedley and so on, flourished.¹⁷ This ‘hidden’ side of the Restoration sex culture was highlighted and continually performed on the eighteenth century stage, even beyond Vanbrugh’s project.

When R. B. Sheridan adapted *The Relapse* into *A Trip to Scarborough* in 1777, explicit erotic representations, including both heterosexual and homosexual, were all gone. The prologue written by David Garrick suggests a view behind this shift:

What various transformations we remark,
 From east Whitechapel to the west Hyde Park!
 Men, women, children, houses, signs, and fashions,
 State, stage, trade, taste, the humours and the passions,
 Th’Exchange, ’Change Alley, wheresoe’er you’re ranging,
 Court, city, country—all are changed, or changing. (Prologue 1-6)

Sheridan and/or Garrick must have had some idea on the Restoration comedy in producing *A Trip to Scarborough* as it is an adaptation of *The Relapse*. The basic idea is that something of the Restoration should be changed. As for the homoerotic desire, Sheridan decided not to succeed Vanbrugh’s tricky Coupler. The ‘old Sodom’ in *The Relapse* is turned into a female character who never tempts Young Fashion. Considering that Vanbrugh’s manipulation to ask the audience to accept the theatrical eroticism, both heterosexual and potentially homosexual, is excluded from *A Trip to Scarborough*, we can deduce that excessive sexual relationships are not regarded entertaining any more on the stage of 1777.

However, it is interesting that Sheridan reckons *The Relapse*,

one of the Restoration comedies, to be a good source for a theatrical entertainment. Sheridan's authorial voice can be overheard through Loveless's argument that reusing old plays can be more amusing than creating new dross:

AMANDA. Plays, I must confess, have some small charms, and would have more, would they restrain that loose encouragement to vice, which shocks, if not the virtue of some women, at least the modesty of all.

LOVELESS. But, till that reformation can be wholly made, 'twould surely be a pity to exclude the productions of some of our best writers for want of a little wholesome pruning, which might be effected by anyone who possessed modesty enough to believe that we should preserve all we can of our deceased authors, at least till they are outdone by the living ones. (2.1.17-26)

In *The Relapse*, the debate by Amanda and Loveless was based on two confronting views by the reformers (like Collier) and the theater advocate (like Vanbrugh and John Dennis). Amanda represented the typical reformer's view that theater is a nest of vice, and Loveless defended the theater saying that 'I would not leave the wholesome corn for some intruding tares that grow amongst it' (*The Relapse* 2.1.25-27). Sheridan rewrites it as a discussion of whether plays by 'deceased authors' are effective as an entertainment. Loveless implies that the old ones, like the Restoration comedies, are not yet outdone by the contemporary plays, which also can be regarded as Sheridan's view of comedy.

This argument needs to be considered in the context of the debate of 'sentimental comedy or laughing comedy', which was developed by Oliver Goldsmith's 'Essay on the Theatres; Or, a Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy' published in 1772. Though Sheridan did not proclaim his advocacy for the laughing comedy by way of an essay, it is widely accepted that Sheridan 'makes his own critical preference for "laughing comedy" as clear through satire as Goldsmith had made his through exposition' (Smith and Lawhon 85). Robert D. Hume insists that the tradition of laughing comedy for Goldsmith and Sheridan does not date back to the Restoration era, but it is also quite obvious in this case that Sheridan uses one of the Restoration comedies as a source for his laughing comedy. While

Vanbrugh manipulated the audience to accept his blasphemous and bawdy representations, with a great affectation that theatrical eroticism is a necessary content for a witty comedy, Sheridan simply rejected them. What is laughable, or what the author expects the audience to laugh at, has changed.

A laughing comedy always deals with human follies. For Vanbrugh, human follies include even extramarital sexual relationships. Sheridan excluded bawdy representations from one of the Restoration sex comedies, which was also a project to bring laughter among the spectators. *A Trip to Scarborough* created a new repertoire for the Drury Lane Theater, and it was performed every year since its premiere of 1777 till 1800. Vanbrugh's original play once 'relapsed' in the summer season of Haymarket Theater in 1784 as an afterpiece in which several characters—only sub-plot members such as Foppington, Fashion, Hoyden and Nurse—were involved. A version of the Restoration comedy, which even required the audience to accept the promiscuous desire as a part of theatrical entertainment, was ended in 1777 when *A Trip to Scarborough* replaced *The Relapse* in the repertoire of the theatre company.

Notes

This paper is based on my oral presentation at the 82nd Conference of The English Literary Society of Japan.

¹ See Hume *Development*, 412-15. Derek Hughes also reads that *Love's Last Shift* 'gratifies both the recidivist taste for sex comedy and the growing demand for theatrical morality' (387). See Hughes 387-96.

² Colley Cibber, *Love's Last Shift; or, The Fool in Fashion*, eds. Timothy J. Viator and William J. Burling, *The Plays of Colley Cibber* Vol. 1 (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2001) pp. 31-132. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by act, scene and line numbers.

³ John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse*, ed. Bernard Harris, New Mermaids (1971: A & C Black, London: 2001). All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by act, scene and line numbers.

⁴ Pieter Jan Van Niel also explicates that the dualism such as 'a relationship between physical death and the death of love by faithlessness' is the 'concept of the whole play' (321).

⁵ E. A. J. Honigsmann once argued that a skilled author would try to manipulate the audience's response, which, he argued, can be observed by reading the text closely: 'As an audience watches a play it "responds" from the first word to the last, and an experienced dramatist knows this and leaves as little as possible to

chance: he adjusts his plotting, and much else besides, to ensure that the audience will respond as he wants. His manipulation of response is therefore one of the dramatist's basic skills, no less important than plotting, characterization, use of imagery or ideas, and the like: and we can observe how it operates exactly as we come to grips with other points of craftsmanship, by studying the text.' (1-2) Honigmann's suggestion is very useful for this paper because *The Relapse* is a manipulative text that repeatedly shows several signs as if the author is trying to reveal something there.

⁶ I agree with C.R. Kropt who argues '*The Relapse* is a direct attack on and answer to the general characteristics of sentimental drama as they appear in *Love's Last Shift*' (194). Kropt analyses only the plot structure in which 'Vanbrugh inverts the typical sentimental plot' (194), but I would argue Vanbrugh's attempt to challenge the sentimental mien of Cibber's, and consequently his effort to manipulate the audiences' reaction to his play, can be read through many other points in the text.

⁷ John Harrington Smith argued that the increasing female audience in the late 1680s, especially around 1688 to 1689, was the key factor that brought a change in comedy from sex-oriented to the sentimental. See Smith.

⁸ George Farquhar notes in the preface to his *The Twin Rivals* that 'A Play without a Beau, Cully, Cuckold, or Coquet, is as Poor an Entertainment to some Pallats, as their Sundays Dinner wou'd be without Beef and Pudding'. Though Farquhar writes with some critical attitude toward it, we can assume that there was a demand for the 'Restoration' comedy to a certain degree. See Hume, 'Jeremy Collier' 504.

⁹ See van Niel, especially 325-26.

¹⁰ Michael Cordner exemplifies several discourses on Christian virtue expressed by clerics such as Richard Baxter and Richard Lucas are inverted point by point in *The Relapse*. See Cordner, 'Time', especially 11-14.

¹¹ See Hume, 'Jeremy Collier', especially 487-94.

¹² Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *A Trip to Scarborough*, ed. Michael Cordner, *Oxford English Drama. Richard Brinsley Sheridan: The School for Scandal and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998): 145-80. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by act, scene and line numbers.

¹³ Most modern editions follow this point.

¹⁴ According to the eighteenth century critics, Walker was 'splendid in some characters, but not an actor of the first rank, despite his fame.' (Highfill 15:220) His most prominent role was Macheath in *The Beggar's Opera*.

¹⁵ Minor actors, such as Peter Bardin and Michael Dyer (both of whose birthdays are not known), took the role of Fashion from the mid 1730s. Coupler was played by minor actors too.

¹⁶ See Trumbach especially 135-38.

¹⁷ As early as in 1663, Samuel Pepys noted about the male same-sex relationship of the town: 'Sir J. Mennes and Mr. Batten both say that buggery is now almost grown as common among our gallants as in Italy, and that the very pages of the town begin to complain of their master of it' (210).

¹⁸ See Hume, *The Rakish Stage* Chapter 10.

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